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‘South African Veterans and the Institutionalisation of Apartheid in South Africa’

© Dr Jonathan Fennell Defence Studies
Department, King’s College London

South African Veterans and the Institutionalisation of Apartheid in South Africa

Jonathan Fennell, King's College London

It is a recurring theme of this book that combatants are affected by war in profound and long lasting ways.¹ Veterans form distinct cohorts in post-war polities and as such warrant attention as discreet historical actors. This chapter, by focusing on the attitudes and voting behaviours of veterans of the Second World War, explores how they shaped the post-war socio-political construct in South Africa. By making use of new sources, in particular 234 reports based on the censorship of mail sent between the battle and home fronts during the Second World War,² the chapter argues that a coincidence of interest and attitudes emerged as a consequence of the conflict that led white veterans to vote for the Herstigte Nasionale Party (HNP) in the 1948 general election. With the Nationalist victory, which ushered in formalised apartheid in South Africa, dependent on 'narrow majorities' in key districts,³ it is likely that the veterans' franchise proved decisive in this epoch defining election.

The chapter explores a number of dynamics that radicalised and politicalised white soldiers during the war. The censorship reports show, for example, that white soldiers were deeply affected by their shared experience of the front line, leading to the development of a new spirit of social solidarity among white South Africans, a sentiment coined 'South Africanism' by some scholars.⁴ Another set of dynamics,

¹ The idea that the war was a transformative event for South African soldiers is not a new one. See, Neil Roos, *Ordinary Springboks: White Servicemen and Social Justice in South Africa, 1939-1961* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005); J. Crwys-Williams, *A Country at War: The Mood of a Nation, 1939-1945* (Rivonia, 1992), p. 34; Francois Oosthuizen, 'Demobilization and the Post War Employment of the White Union Defence Force Soldiers', *Scientia Militaria*, Vol. 23, No. 4 (1993); François Oosthuizen, 'Soldiers and Politics: The Political Ramification of the White Union Defence Forces Soldiers' Demobilisation Experience after the Second World War', *South African Journal of Military Studies*, Vol. 24, No. 1 (1994); Albert Grundlingh, 'The King's Afrikaners? Enlistment and Ethnic Identity in the Union of South Africa's Defence Force During the Second World War, 1939-45', *The Journal of African History*, Vol. 40, No. 3 (November, 1999); Louis Grundlingh, 'Soldiers and Politics: A Study of the Political Consciousness of Black South African Soldiers During and After the Second World War', *Historia*, Vol. 36, No. 2 (1991); Ian Van der Waag, *A Military History of Modern South Africa* (Johannesburg: Jonathan Ball, 2015).

² The censorship reports, which form the backbone of this study, were typically compiled from the examination of about 7 per cent of the total number of letters sent by soldiers in any period. They described in detail the attitudes and state of morale of the troops and their families and friends at home; they covered a broad range of issues, and tended to focus on views that represented a considerable body of opinion among cohorts rather than on isolated instances of over-exuberance or ill-temper. They, therefore, provide a reliable documented insight into the concerns of a people at war and can be considered analogous to sources such as Gallop Polls and Mass Observation studies in terms of their significance for historians of social and political change in the twentieth century (see Archives New Zealand [hereafter ANZ], WAI/1/DA, 302/15/1-31, History 1 and 2 NZ Field Censor Sections, pp. 35-54; ANZ, WAI/1/DA508/3, 1 and 2 NZ Field Censor Section Weekly Reports, 1943, 1944, 1945; Australian War Memorial [hereafter AWM], 54 883/2/97, Middle East Field Censorship Weekly Summary, [hereafter MEFCWS], No. I (12 to 18 Nov. 1941), p. 1).

³ Kenneth A. Heard, *General Elections in South Africa, 1943-1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 46.

⁴ Saul Dubow, 'Scientism, Social Research and the Limits of "South Africanism": The Case of Ernst Gideon Malherbe', *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 44 (May 2001), p. 100; John Lambert, 'An Identity Threatened: White English-speaking South Africans, Britishness and Dominion South

however, negatively affected the relationship between white and black and coloured South Africans. On the home front, the government's inability to ensure anything close to equality of sacrifice meant that working class and middle class whites found themselves squeezed from the top by industrialists and from the bottom by black labour. On the battlefield, 'attempts to augment white fighting units by arming black soldiers faltered in the face of white South African racial sensitivities'.⁵ The powerful forces of combat cohesion did not play out for white and black and coloured servicemen. In the circumstances, dissatisfaction with the way the war was managed took on a racial element, while, paradoxically, there was an urgent desire to be rid of 'racialism' between English and Afrikaans speaking segments of society. Thus, the conditions for institutionalised apartheid were substantially shaped by the experience of the war.

The 1943 General Election

At first glance, the suggestion that South African veterans voted for the Nationalists in 1948 does not seem convincing. While detailed statistics of how ex-soldiers voted in 1948 are not available, they are available for the 1943 general election, and they show that soldiers voted overwhelmingly for the United Party (UP), the main opponents of the Nationalists in 1948 (see Table One). 83,131 ballots were cast by service personnel in June and July 1943, 9.39 per cent of all votes counted (885,623). The results showed overwhelming support among soldiers for the pro-war government parties (the UP, the Labour Party and the Dominion Party);⁶ no less than 92 per cent of soldiers voted for government parties as compared to 54 per cent of civilians. In contrast, the two main opposition parties, the HNP and the Afrikaner Party, together polled a paltry 4.1 per cent of the soldiers' vote, while they won a more impressive 41 per cent of the civilian franchise.⁷

Africanism, 1934-1939', *Kleio*, Volume 37, No. 1 (2010), pp. 50-70; John Lambert, "'The Finest Hour?'" English-speaking South Africans and World War II', *South African Historical Journal*, Volume 60, No. 1 (2008), pp. 76-7.

⁵ Roos, *Ordinary Springboks*, p. 34.

⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 80-8.

⁷ University of South Africa United Party Archives [*hereafter* UNISA UP], Kleyntons Poster Collection, Poster Number 416; South African National Defence Force Documentation Centre [*hereafter* SANDF, DOC] Adjutant General Files [*hereafter* AG] 3/154 Box 78 General Election, 1943.

Table One: Percentages of party votes in the South African General Election of 1943: The Civilian and Forces Vote.⁸

Party	Civilian Vote	Forces Vote	Total
UP	46.4%	78.1%	49.3%
HNP	39.2%	3.6%	36.0%
LP	4.5%	8.2%	4.8%
DP	3.1%	5.8%	3.3%
AP	1.8%	0.5%	1.7%
CP	0.8%	0.9%	0.8%
I. Lab	0.1%	0.2%	0.1%
Ind*	4.2%	2.7%	4.0%
Government	54%	92%	57%

*Includes the Volkseenheid candidates.

The HNP's appalling set of results in the soldiers' vote in 1943 is all the more perplexing considering that the experience of the war had clearly, according to a wide range of sources, stirred 'left-wing' and communitarian tendencies among British and Commonwealth troops; the HNP had a largely 'left leaning' manifesto. The South African Military Censorship Summary for the period 1 to 20 August 1942, for example, pointed to a 'growing Leftist leaning among soldiers', especially among members of the Springbok Legion. Calls to win the war were 'coupled with cries for Governmental reform'. The Directorate of Military Intelligence, which commissioned a Gallop Poll on 'Soldiers' Grievances' in September 1942, pointed to 'distinct Leftist tendencies amongst our troops,' many of whom were 'looking for a "New Order"'. These feelings, or 'the political bias of the troops', appeared to emerge from 'dissatisfaction with service conditions and the general prosecution of the war effort'.⁹

The HNP manifesto played to many of these perspectives. 'We are anti-imperialistic' read the manifesto released to the soldiers' newspaper, *Springbok*, on 17 June, but 'also anti-capitalistic . . . We regard the continuance of the pre-war conditions of poverty and want . . . as an infinitely greater disaster than the war itself'.¹⁰ Their social-economic programme had four 'cornerstones'. The first pointed out that the State had the 'obligation of creating humane and secure living conditions' for its people, including 'social security', 'proper housing', 'health services', 'employment' and 'wages'. The second 'cornerstone' held that 'the Exchequer is there for the people and not the people for the Exchequer'. The third addressed the need for the 'distribution of wealth with greater justice' and included the regulation of prices, profits and wages, and the nationalisation of key industries, such as gold mines and banks. The fourth 'cornerstone' clearly marked the road to formalised apartheid and the maintenance of

⁸ UNISA UP, Kleyntons Poster Collection, Poster Number 416; SANDF, DOC, AG 3/154 Box 78 General Election, 1943.

⁹ SANDF, DOC, Army Intelligence [hereafter AI] Gp 1 Box 81/I/71/B South African Military Censorship Summary [hereafter SAMCS] No. 11, 1 to 20 August 1942, pp. 3-4 and No. 13, 1 to 29 September 1942, p. 3. The poll was based on 10,164 censored letters. See also, Jonathan Fennell, 'Soldiers and Social Change: The Forces Vote in the Second World War and New Zealand's Great Experiment in Social Citizenship', *English Historical Review*, Vol. 132, Issue. 554 (2017).

¹⁰ SANDF, DOC, War Diaries [hereafter WD] Box 314 *Springbok*, 'Election Supplement', 17 June 1943.

what the manifesto referred to as a 'white man's country'. It promised to take steps to 'protect European employment and wages against deadening competition, which is now filling our urban slums with white poverty and misery'. From the HNP's perspective, social solidarity for the white races could only be achieved through the social exclusion of black and coloured South Africans; one could not exist without the other.¹¹

The political preferences of ordinary white South African citizen soldiers clearly resonated, to a significant degree, with the policies of the HNP. The soldiers' vote in the 1943 general election, however, was not shaped by socio-economic considerations. The election was fought, as General Jan Smuts, the South African Prime Minister and leader of the UP, hoped and anticipated, over one key issue, the great question of the day, South Africa's continued involvement in the war. By 1943, the home front in South Africa was tearing itself apart. The continuing controversy over the decision to take the country to war had led to widespread disillusionment among Afrikaners and a protracted campaign of civil disobedience and even terrorism by dissident Afrikaner organisations such as the Ossawa Brandwag. It was clear to Smuts that he had little option but to hold an election and seek a mandate from the people to continue with the war policy.¹²

The UP explicitly warned in its manifesto published in *Springbok* that any votes for non-Government parties would 'assist the anti-war parties and subversive elements' in the country. The Dominion Party, in the very first line of its manifesto, made a similar statement: 'Nothing can be allowed to divert the country's energies from the supreme object of winning the war. This is vital: nothing else matters'. The Labour Party chimed to the same tune, 'in this General Election the paramount issue is the war issue'. In contrast, the opposition parties were clearly and vehemently opposed to continued participation in the war. The Afrikaner Party stated that its election aims were

The immediate cessation of the . . . present Government[']s . . . slavish obedience to overseas decisions dictated by overseas considerations and interests, as well as the immediate cessation of the exhaustion of South African resources and assets in a war which is being fought in Europe and will be decided in Europe.¹³

The HNP, while they promised to maintain the pensions and other privileges granted to European soldiers and their dependents, were similarly 'opposed to our country being dragged deeper into the war'. They wanted to bring back troops within the borders of South Africa and demobilise the non-European elements on active service.¹⁴

The overwhelming impression from the censorship summaries is that it was the continued involvement in the war that dominated soldiers' deliberations. Having volunteered to fight, the vast majority, perhaps unsurprisingly, supported the war. They also realised 'the need for a powerful Government' if the conflict was to be prosecuted effectively. Thus, it was estimated in the summaries before the election that 95 per cent of the troops would vote for the Government, a pretty accurate assessment as it turned

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² F.D. Tothill, 'The Soldiers' Vote and Its Effect on the Outcome of the South African General Election of 1943', *South African Historical Journal*, Vol. 21 (1989), pp. 73-4.

¹³ SANDF, DOC, WD Box 314 *Springbok*, 'Election Supplement', 17 June 1943.

¹⁴ Ibid.

out.¹⁵ ‘The vital necessity’ to keep the Government, and particularly Smuts, in power during the war, was the ‘outstanding factor’ motivating how the troops would vote. After the war was over and done with, many soldiers said, ‘it will be time enough to view each of the parties through party lines alone’.¹⁶ The soldiers’ newspaper, *Springbok*, certainly seemed to have seen the election in this light. It announced the results on 30 July as an ‘overwhelming vindication’ of the ‘war policy of the Government since September 1939’.¹⁷

The Disenchanted Soldier

The 1943 election, therefore, gave a misleading impression of strength to the UP and weakness to the HNP. Ten of the 132 contested districts were decided by the military franchise, all ten going to the government rather than the HNP. In just about all the other districts, the UP performed better due to the soldiers’ vote. This fostered overconfidence and complacency in spite of the soldiers’ deep developing dissatisfaction with the status quo.¹⁸ The Government’s inability to arbitrate between competing interests in South African society, and, particularly, to ensure equality of sacrifice, increasingly undermined its popularity. It appeared to many that the ‘stay-at-homes and the disloyal’ had not only saved their own skins, but, also, benefitted materially from the war.¹⁹

By August 1944, the censors were reporting that domestic morale had ‘fallen to a very low ebb’. The war had faded into insignificance and been replaced by ‘political and social matters’ in the Union. ‘Numerous extracts’ revealed that citizens were ‘distrustful and ANGRY’, especially in thickly populated areas, and that they fully expected a ‘sweeping victory for Dr. Malan at the next election’. The censors were concerned that these attitudes would ‘undermine the confidence of our troops’, but, also could lead to Malan assuming power much in the same way that General Herzog took over shortly after the First World War.²⁰

In Durban, two interlinked issues in particular appeared to be key, firstly the shortage and unequal distribution of foodstuffs and ‘profiteering’ by segments of the Indian community.²¹ By the middle of 1944, the censors were pointing to the extreme hardships being suffered by servicemen’s families. They commented that ‘for the unfortunate wives of servicemen and poor people also, who have young children to provide for, the position is desperate’.²² By August, the censors reported that ‘under the present system there are complaints of malnutrition and in some cases starvation from the lower paid

¹⁵ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 81/I/71/B South African Military Censorship [*hereafter* SAMC], Special Report No. 12, ‘Reactions to General Election in the Cape Fortress Area’, 1 to 14 June 1943, p. 1.

¹⁶ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 81/I/71/B SAMCS No. 21, ‘Post Election Repercussions’, 20 June to 10 July 1943.

¹⁷ SANDF, DOC, WD Box 314 *Springbok*, ‘Election Supplement’, 30 July 1943.

¹⁸ Tothill, ‘The Soldiers’ Vote’, p. 84.

¹⁹ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 42/I/37 Durban Military Censorship Summary [*hereafter* DMCS] No. 86, July 1944.

²⁰ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 42/I/37 Durban Forces Mail Summary [*hereafter* DFMS] No. 87, August 1944.

²¹ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 42/I/37/B DMCS No. 85 and 86, June and July 1944.

²² SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 42/I/37/B DMCS No. 85, June 1944.

workers and soldiers' families'. In September, the censor commented that some letters were 'distressing for even censorship examiners to read'.²³

It is not surprising, therefore, that by March 1945 the censors were noting that 'the flame of duty and sacrifice' in service families 'seems to have been quenched'. The report for July outlined how 'personal readjustment during the coming decade, rather than communal or national, seems to be the first and only consideration'.²⁴ Having suffered so much for so long, service families wanted to see their quality of life improve and improve quickly.

As the end of the war drew near, it became increasingly clear that a 'vast number of people' were hoping for the introduction of 'social security and reforms' in South Africa. 'In other words they are expecting many of the wartime undertakings to be implemented and it will not be so easy for Governments to pigeon hole wartime promises as it was after the last Great War'.²⁵ The apparent lack of progress in this regard left people disenchanted.²⁶ In July 1945, the Durban censors reported that 60 per cent of letters sent from home were 'petulant or complaining and recorded domestic unhappiness, family quarrels, sickness' and dissatisfaction with the state of South Africa. With regards to housing and accommodation, letters were unfavourable in a ratio of 32:1; in terms of cost of living they were unfavourable in a ratio of 11:1; while writers were negative about the cost and shortage of food in a ratio of 10:1.²⁷

The censors fretted that it was 'impossible to prevent' such 'bitter complaints' from reaching the troops abroad and it was 'feared' that 'the men would become apprehensive, alarmed and despondent and 'not thank South Africa for permitting their families to suffer such hardships during their absence'. Indeed, censorship showed that these matters were 'uppermost in the minds of our Troops serving abroad'.²⁸ The summaries from Italy, in 1944 and 1945, were highly critical of matters on the home front. Concern was 'evinced by the troops' at reports of food shortages in the country; blaming it on 'mismanagement on the part of the authorities, who are also accused by some of allowing their homeland to slump into a state of general disorder'. The censors noted that 'disgust at the alleged flourishing state of the black market' was a 'common feature of the mail, and the authorities are indicted for "sitting back and allowing it"'. The men were 'not very happy about the general position' with regards to housing either.²⁹ By 1945, they were so dismayed that the censors referred to 'an anti-Smuts movement' that seemed to have formed in the Central Mediterranean Force and Middle East Force;³⁰ 'Many men in the field' wanted 'to experiment along new lines rather than follow existing theories which have not proved infallible'.³¹

²³ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 42/I/37 DFMS Nos. 87 and 88, August, September 1944.

²⁴ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 42/I/37 DFMS Nos. 94 and 98, March and July 1945.

²⁵ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp Box 42/I/37 DFMS No. 93, February 1945.

²⁶ See, e.g., Roos, *Ordinary Springboks*, p. 11.

²⁷ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 42/I/37 Forces Mail Censorship Durban Summary No. 98, July 1945.

²⁸ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 42/I/37/B DMCS No. 85, June 1944; SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 42/I/37 DFMS, Nos. 87,88, 96, 98, August and September 1944 and May and July 1945.

²⁹ National Archives of the United Kingdom [hereafter NA] War Office Files [hereafter WO] 204/10382 Central Mediterranean Force Appreciation and Censorship Report [hereafter CMFACR] Nos. 57, 58, 63 and 67, 16 to 30 November 1944, p. D2, 1 to 15 December 1944, p. D2, 15 to 28 February 1945, p. D2, 16 to 30 April 1945, p. C2.

³⁰ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 42/I/37 DFMS No. 96 and 98, May and July 1945.

³¹ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 42/I/37 DFMS Nos. 88 and 93, September 1944 and February 1945.

Demobilisation

The cessation of hostilities in May 1945 did not lead to any great change in the perspectives of the troops, despite plans for soldier-friendly demobilisation. The ‘cornerstone’ of the demobilisation scheme was the recognition of the white male veteran’s right to employment.³² Those that had given up employment prior to joining were guaranteed work ‘under conditions no less favourable’ than those existing at the time of their enlistment. Volunteers with no employment to which to return, were retained on military strength with full pay and allowances until suitable employment could be found. If the ex-soldier lost employment through no fault of his own within a year, he could also return to the Army until another suitable position was found. No person other than an ex-soldier could be appointed to a post unless the Department of Labour could provide a certificate confirming that no suitable ex-soldier was available for the post in question.³³

As enlightened as Government policy towards the return of the UDF to the Union appeared to be, it was ‘worlds apart from the way the soldiers experienced it at first hand’.³⁴ Matters did not start well when delays in repatriation led to ‘much adverse criticism of the authorities on the grounds of “muddle” and “broken promises”’³⁵, which culminated in a riot in Helwan camp in August 1945.³⁶ The South African economy was not ready to receive the ex-soldiers. Unlike the United Kingdom, the discharge of soldiers was not controlled in accordance with the conversion of industry from a war to a peacetime setting. Thus, there was no guarantee that demobilised men had employment to which to return immediately; according to the Directorate of Demobilisation, by August 1945 there were 46,475 servicemen looking for employment but only 20,944 vacancies in industry.³⁷

Moreover, on getting home, the soldiers found that their standard of living was no better than it had been before they joined the Army. For some, especially those in lower income groups, it dropped considerably. The increased cost of living, which had caused so much havoc on the home front during the war, now impacted on the demobilised soldier. The post-war world was for some ‘a cold hard place where everyone was out for himself’.³⁸ The state’s inability to provide work and housing for returning servicemen challenged their sense of social justice.

White working-class veterans saw themselves at a relative disadvantage to those who had stayed at home or worse still, had betrayed the war effort. Expensive to

³² Roos, *Ordinary Springboks*, p. 111.

³³ Oosthuizen, ‘Demobilisation and the Post-War Employment of the White Union Defence Forces Soldier’, *Militaria*, pp. 33-4.

³⁴ Ibid., pp. 32-6; K.J. Gibbs, ‘Demobilisation after World War II: The Process and Politics of Reinstating Union Defence Force Volunteers into Civilian Life, 1943-1948’, University of South Africa Paper (1990), p. 31.

³⁵ NA WO 204/10382 CMFACR No. 70, 1 to 15 June 1945, p. C1.

³⁶ Roos, *Ordinary Springboks*, p. 97.

³⁷ Oosthuizen, ‘Demobilisation and the Post-War Employment of the White Union Defence Forces Soldier’, *Militaria*, pp. 32-6; K.J. Gibbs, ‘Demobilisation after World War II’, p. 31.

³⁸ Oosthuizen, ‘Soldiers and Politics’, *Militaria*, p. 21.

employ and inappropriately skilled, white ex-servicemen's lack of occupational mobility made them vulnerable to a variety of pressures.³⁹

The impacts of a challenging job market were exacerbated by a shortage of housing. By 1945, it was estimated that 130,000 houses were needed nationally for whites alone. In the circumstances, the State facilitated the provision of land to white ex-servicemen who could then build homes of their own. The government guaranteed a building society loan to help the soldier with these costs but even with this support the cost of this buy-build scheme 'were beyond the means of poor white ex-servicemen'.⁴⁰

The Issue of Race

It is difficult to disassociate these issues and dynamics from the direction South African politics took post 1948. While the economic position of many whites deteriorated during the war, that of black South Africans noticeably improved; for example, the wages of black workers rose dramatically, faster even than those of white workers. Faced with labour shortages, not least due to the fact that a significant proportion of the white male working population were serving in the armed forces, the wartime administration authorised a greater number of black South Africans to work in skilled positions. This problem (from the perspective of some whites) was compounded after the fall of Tobruk in June 1942, after which a greater proportion of recruits were drawn from more prosperous urban areas, thus increasing again the demand for black labour in skilled positions. Moreover, when the compulsory arbitration of industrial disputes was introduced in 1942, the Wage Boards were often the arbitrator, resolving most disputes in favour of black workers.⁴¹ At the same time, South Africa experienced 'a mass migration' of black workers to the cities.⁴² On a conservative estimate, during the war the urban black population increased by about half a million to 1,689,000.⁴³ The number of Africans employed in manufacturing rose from 151,889 before the war to 369,055 in 1949/50. African employment in private industry during roughly the same period increased by 111 per cent in the Southern Transvaal, 190 per cent around Durban, and more than 240 per cent in the Cape. The Eastern Cape, site of the country's rudimentary automobile industry, witnessed the highest increase (of 287 per cent). Overall, black urbanisation increased from 18.9 per cent in 1936 to 27.1 per cent in 1951.⁴⁴

These dynamics had a direct effect on white South Africans. As the war drew to a close, the censors described 'grave forebodings of impending trouble', even to the possibility of 'rebellion . . . unrest, revolution, bloodshed and civil war'. It was generally felt that the government's policies had 'failed lamentably' and not prevented 'rackets, ramps and profiteering'. They were blamed for 'every short supply of any commodity, for the alleged "mess" and "muddle" in providing houses' and for the 'outrageous retail prices'. People felt deeply aggrieved, as they had been promised that 'THIS TIME there

³⁹ Roos, *Ordinary Springboks*, pp. 114-16.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 116-7.

⁴¹ Jeremy Seeking and Nicoli Nattrass, *Class, Race, and Inequality in South Africa* (London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 88-9; Roos, *Ordinary Springboks*, p. 35.

⁴² Annette Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa* (London: IB Tauris, 1996), p. 73.

⁴³ Roos, *Ordinary Springboks*, p. 107.

⁴⁴ Seegers, *The Military in the Making of Modern South Africa*, p. 73.

would be No profiteering' and much of this anger was focused on 'Jews and Coolies'. Whites in Durban could not reconcile profiteering by Indian shopkeepers with their desire to 'live amongst us as equals' after the war. Indeed, 'Indian encroachment' and demands for 'equal rights' were 'definitely regarded as a menace and [were] feared accordingly'. By February 1945, there were growing concerns that the Indians might 'succeed in linking up with the native . . . Cape Malay and Coloured elements'. The high cost of black labour (relative to what it had been) was now being felt and non-European troops that had returned from 'Up North' were considered 'most disrespectful . . . quarrelsome and insolent'.⁴⁵

These issues placed much pressure on the returned white serviceman who lacked artisan skills and 'were particularly vulnerable since it was far cheaper to employ black men'.⁴⁶ Additionally, as one serviceman stated in 1943, 'a large amount of surplus money was in circulation "due to the Government paying unskilled and semi-skilled labourers excessive wages"'.⁴⁷ This caused inflation, which in turn squeezed standards of living. In the prevailing circumstances, dissatisfaction with the government took on a racial element,⁴⁸ a dynamic made more problematic by the fact that the war had hardened white servicemen's racial prejudices and encouraged many to seek extreme solutions to the 'colour problem'.

While there is some evidence to suggest that white and black troops served together harmoniously in the Second World War,⁴⁹ the dominant impression that emerges from censorship and intelligence reports is that the war exacerbated rather than ameliorated racial tensions between white and black South Africans. Throughout the war, attempts to augment white fighting units by arming black soldiers failed.⁵⁰ Thus, the powerful forces of combat cohesion did not play out for white and black South African soldiers. In March 1941, for example, one man wrote from East Africa,

It makes my blood boil to sit next to coloureds – especially Indians, and that's what we had to do on Sunday (in a cinema). They were the only seats we could get. Most of the shops here are owned by Indians and they certainly know how to profiteer.⁵¹

Many South Africans couldn't accept that they had 'instructions to treat niggers as our pals'.

Can you imagine any European with some self-respect doing that? I'm dashed if I can, and I'm dammed if I'm going to treat one of them on equal footing. What the

⁴⁵ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 42/I/37 DFMS No. 88, 89, 93, 95, 96, September, October 1944, February, April, May 1945; SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 42/I/37 DMCS No. 86, July 1944.

⁴⁶ Roos, *Ordinary Springboks*, p. 106.

⁴⁷ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 81/I/71/B SAMCS No. 27, 'A General Survey on Morale in the Army', 22 February to 21 July 1943, p. 7.

⁴⁸ Dubow, 'Scientism, Social Research and the Limits of "South Africanism"', *South African Historical Journal*, p. 112.

⁴⁹ Grundlingh, 'Soldiers and Politics', *Historia*, 60.

⁵⁰ Roos, *Ordinary Springboks*, p. 34.

⁵¹ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 43/I/38/D Military Censorship Summary No. 10, East African Force Headquarters, 6 to 20 March 1941, p. 3.

devil is it going to be like when we get back to the Union? Personally I'll lay the first one out that sits on a seat next to me.⁵²

Censorship in the Middle East, in 1942 and 1943, regularly noted 'expressions of regret that S.A. Natives were brought to the M.E.'. Writers claimed that contact with white servicemen and civilians had made black troops 'insubordinate and unmanageable and they are expected to foment trouble on their return to the Union as in their present frame of mind they are totally unsuited to S.A. conditions'.⁵³ In February 1943, the censors remarked that 'concern is shown over the consequences of their mixing with whites as equals, and their eventual demand for equal treatment after the war'. A trooper wrote,

Such matters, "post war problems", are being widely debated amongst ourselves . . . The native problem is going to be one of the most urgent matters to be settled. Do you know that up here, there is practically no distinction between European and Native soldiers? They frequent the same NAAFI canteens, using the same crockery and furniture, and in many other respects, they rub shoulders with one another [sic] day by day. This is chiefly because they are under Imperial Command . . . There is nothing we can do about it, and we fully realise that the native soldier is doing his bit in this war. But what is going to happen when we are all out of uniform, and demanding the fulfilment of all the solemn promises, being made by responsible people, to men who had joined up.⁵⁴

Attitudes did not change as the war wore on. White South African troops in Italy in 1944 and 1945 recurrently 'expressed concern' regarding the 'possible effect upon SA coloured personnel' with regards to 'social equality . . . fear being expressed that there will be unfortunate repercussions in the Union on the return home of these men'.⁵⁵ The 'Indian question' and 'post-war Native Policy' were clearly, therefore, 'sources of concern' that would require action on the cessation of hostilities.⁵⁶

In South Africa, where the 'colour bar' did function during the war, white servicemen were particularly keen to ensure that black citizens and soldiers 'knew their place' and would not be 'contaminated' by the war experience. For example, 'loyal' white soldiers were involved in the brutal suppression of riots by black labourers and soldiers protesting against their discriminatory treatment at the hands of the South African State. One of the better-known examples is the Marabastad Riot of 28 December 1942.

On that evening, a violent standoff developed between local law enforcement officers and a few hundred black workers, who were in dispute with the Marabastad, Pretoria, municipal council over pay. As the situation deteriorated, an alarmed white civilian rushed to the Central Army Transit Depot (CADT), less than a kilometre away, to ask for help. A force of four officers and eighty armed men were dispatched to the scene, but upon their arrival matters got out of hand. Corporal J.P. Coetzee, who belonged to

⁵² SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 40 I/35, Intelligence Corps to Administrative H.Q., U.D.F., M.E.F., 23 May 1942.

⁵³ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 43 I/38(I) MEMCFS No. LIV, 30 December 1942 to 12 January 1943, p. 20.

⁵⁴ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 43 I/38(I) MEMCFS No. LVII, 10 to 23 February 1943, p. 20.

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⁵⁶ NA WO 204/10382 CMFACR Nos. 60, 63 and 71, 1 to 15 January 1945, p. D2, 15 to 28 February 1945, p. D2 and 16 to 30 June 1945, p. C2.

the CATD, but was off duty and coincidentally on the scene, attached himself to the military force and began attacking a group of rioters with a stick. The rioters fought back and two officers opened fire to protect Coetzee, who himself fell to the ground. General firing then commenced.⁵⁷ The censors summarised what one Staff Sergeant wrote after the event, that South African troops had 'opened fire and shot indiscriminately'.

The poor nigs got jammed in the compound gate and were badly shot up. The natives continuously tried to break out of the gates and storm us but they were not dealing with the police but the Army, and when they rushed to stab one of our soldiers the first one dropped dead as a chap shot him through the heart. The order came "fire" and their dead piled up three feet high.⁵⁸

A Corporal, who was at the scene, wrote that the 'soldiers got out of hand – the men just went mad and fired right into them and also charged them with fixed bayonets'. Another recalled how 'one man continued firing until his rifle was taken from him'.⁵⁹ By the time the fighting had calmed down, sixteen black workers were dead and at least another fifty-nine were wounded, of whom twenty-nine were treated in hospital. One white man, Coetzee, was killed, ironically by a bullet from one of the officer's service revolver. One soldier and about seven policemen received minor wounds.⁶⁰

In reviewing the riot, the censors were struck by the 'surprisingly large number' that 'enjoyed themselves thoroughly, and were by no means averse to shooting down natives'. Many saw the riot as a welcome 'break from the monotony of camp routine' and at least one writer regretted that they had not been allowed to 'wipe the whole lot out'.⁶¹ It was clear from the judicial commission of inquiry that took place after the event that the black workers had made use of a variety of weapons, but no fire-arms, and of the sixteen blacks killed, ten had received their fatal wounds in the back.⁶²

Another incident took place a few days later at Sonderwater, on the night of 31 December 1942. This time, however, the rioters were men of the 4th Cape Corps Battalion. Although no men were killed, physical force was again used and 25 'ringleaders' were arrested. Much like the conflagration at Marabastad, but apparently not linked to it, the immediate cause of the problem was pay. A staff sergeant in the Cape Corp wrote that the officers were 'bringing ladies into camp in the evening for a dance, and fearing that if the men were paid they would drink themselves drunk and cause disturbances' refused to give them their dues. However, as the censors reviewed the causes of the conflagration in the men's letters

It became quite clear that the course of the riot was determined largely by colour prejudice. It would appear that the minor issues were submerged in the far greater problem of colour, and the riot culminated in an out and out clash between the N.E.'s [Non-Europeans] and Europeans, a clash where the righting of social injustices

⁵⁷ J.E.H. Grobler, 'The Marabastad Riot, 1942', *Contree*, No. 32 (1992), p. 27.

⁵⁸ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 81/I/71/B SAMC, Special Report No. 3, 'The C.A.T.D. and the Marabastad Compound Riot', 28 December 1942.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ Grobler, 'The Marabastad Riot, 1942', *Contree*, p. 28.

⁶¹ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 81/I/71/B 'The C.A.T.D. and the Marabastad Compound Riot'.

⁶² Grobler, 'The Marabastad Riot, 1942', *Contree*, p. 28.

became the determining factor for the N.E.'s. The riot apparently served as an outlet for pent up feelings. "Here happened a revolution with us against the Europeans. It's a long time that we suffer and always through the Europeans, not only in civilian time but all over, and we also ought to get victory over them".⁶³

The censors found that 'the Cape Coloureds' were 'more tolerant than the Europeans' and, on the whole, accepted blame for the outburst. On the other hand, 'the hatred of the Europeans for the coloureds is much more freely expressed. "Black swine", "pests", "drunken black rats", "vuil honde" [filthy dogs], are some of the phrases used'. Accounts of the riot were given 'with relish' by European soldiers and 'wishes for a recurrence of riots' were 'freely expressed'. However, the censors also pointed to the 'quite interesting' detail that 'invariably all English-speaking correspondents advocate the use of force, whereas Afrikaans-speaking writers concentrate more on the fear of revolt and fear of the coloureds being given social equality'. There was also strong criticisms of the Government, which was accused of 'appeasement' and 'being far too lenient'. One trooper wrote that 'our declared policy of dithering effeminacy prevented the coloureds from receiving a sharp enough lesson'. A very large number of writers advocated immediate action by the Smuts government; many demanded 'subjugation by force' of the non-European community in the country. The censors continued pessimistically that

In discussing post-war conditions, writers invariably forecast more trouble and call these riots and strikes "the forerunners of what is coming all over the world". South Africa's future from this particular aspect is viewed with alarm by many and it appears to be generally accepted that "much bloodshed will result after the war".⁶⁴

Following the riot at Sonderwater, the 4th Cape Corps Battalion was transferred to the Dutoitspan Training Camp near Kimberley. However, here, again, on 6 February 1943, about 80 to 100 men rioted. Many members of the unit were put in detention and 67 rioters were arrested. There were no serious casualties, but seventeen men did suffer minor injuries and lacerations. Again, the censors pointed out that 'these riots have led to an increase in the expression of colour antipathy. The Europeans are the more bitter, and their comments often disclose violent hatred'.⁶⁵

The 1948 General Election

In some ways, the war was a unifying experience for South Africa, in that the shared experience of the front line brought English and Afrikaans speakers together.⁶⁶ Throughout the war, censorship of soldiers' letters revealed much 'evidence of complete harmony between speakers of English and of Afrikaans, respectively, within the Union Forces'. As a soldier in the 6th South African Armoured Division wrote in

⁶³ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 81/I/71/B SAMC, Special Report No. 4, 'Disturbance at Sonderwater', 31 December 1942.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 81/I/71/B SAMC, Special Report No. 7, 'The Riot at Kimberley', 9 to 25 February 1943.

⁶⁶ For more on this dynamic, see Jonathan Fennell, *The Peoples' Armies: The British and Commonwealth Armies and the Second World War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, in press 2018).

December 1944, 'it is very pleasant to see that here . . . [in Italy] there is no racial hatred. If a man speaks to you in Afrikaans, you answer him in Afrikaans'.⁶⁷

However, the manner in which the war was managed dramatically deepened other divisions in South African society, divisions based on race and class. There was widespread feeling that,

This is simply a war where the rich get richer and the poor get poorer. The poor man is forced to join up – he had no option, otherwise he starves – but the rich have sufficient money to stay at home and live on the fat of the land and make yet more money'.⁶⁸

In the prevailing circumstances, dissatisfaction with the government caused by these changes took on a racial element,⁶⁹ while, paradoxically, there was an 'urgent desire' to be rid of 'racialism' between English and Afrikaans speaking segments of society.⁷⁰ Irrespective of ethnicity, all white men were understood to have the right to 'social justice' and a reasonable quality of life. Social cohesion and solidarity among whites, however, was seen, in the peculiar and racialised environment of the Union, to be threatened by the economic and political aspirations of black and coloured South Africans, many of whom were radicalised by the experience of the war.⁷¹ Thus, the belief grew that, for all whites to prosper, black and coloured South Africans would have to be excluded economically and politically from South African society.

The conditions for institutionalised apartheid in South Africa had been substantially shaped by the soldiers' experience of the war. It would, of course, as Neil Roos has put it, 'make a neat argument' if historians could prove that these attitudes directly encouraged white veterans to vote for the HNP in 1948 and that their votes proved decisive in what ended up being a very closely fought election.⁷² The Nationalists won an outright majority with only 39.4 per cent of the votes⁷³ and the 'critical Nationalist gains' were generally won 'with only narrow majorities'.⁷⁴ William Beinart has estimated that the Nationalist victory was probably dependent on no more than a 'protest vote of perhaps 20 per cent of English-speakers'.⁷⁵ For these reasons, historians such as Albert Grundlingh, Rodney Davenport, Christopher Saunders and Beinart have speculated that the ex-military vote may have played an important role in 1948.⁷⁶

⁶⁷ NA WO 204/10382 CMFACR No. 59, 16 to 31 December 1944, p. D2.

⁶⁸ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp 1 Box 81/I/71/B 'A General Survey on Morale in the Army', 22 February to 21 July 1943, p. 6.

⁶⁹ Dubow, 'Scientism, Social Research and the Limits of "South Africanism"', *South African Historical Journal*, p. 112.

⁷⁰ SANDF, DOC, AI Gp Box 42/I/37 DFMS No. 93, February 1945.

⁷¹ For more on this dynamic see Dubow, 'Scientism, Social Research and the Limits of "South Africanism"', *South African Historical Journal*, pp. 99-101; Grundlingh, 'Soldiers and Politics', *Historia*.

⁷² Roos, *Ordinary Springboks*, p. 121.

⁷³ Rodney Davenport and Christopher Saunders, *South Africa: A Modern History, Fifth Edition* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 372.

⁷⁴ Kenneth A. Heard, *General Elections in South Africa, 1943-1970* (London: Oxford University Press, 1974), p. 46.

⁷⁵ William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 138.

⁷⁶ Grundlingh, 'The King's Afrikaners?'; Rodney Davenport and Christopher Saunders, *South Africa: A Modern History, Fifth Edition* (London: Macmillan, 2000), p. 370; William Beinart, *Twentieth Century South Africa* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 138. Other historians have differed from this

Grundlingh has certainly intimated that Afrikaner veterans voted for the HNP. He has argued that the disenchantment of Afrikaans speakers with Smuts and the military 'coincided with attempts' by organisations like the OB 'not only to temper their criticisms of Afrikaners who had enlisted but also actively to woo them back into the fold'.

Once it had become clear that the tide of war had turned against Germany, Afrikaner nationalists modified their earlier anti-war policy and this, together with a desire to bring about greater Afrikaner unity, contributed to the more conciliatory attitude towards Afrikaans-speaking soldiers. Although a range of factors account for the Afrikaner victory at the polls in 1948, it would not be inaccurate to include among these the social dynamics generated by Afrikaner participation in the war, and the impact of Afrikaner soldiers who had returned much more disgruntled with the United Party government than had been the case upon their enlistment.⁷⁷

There are, unfortunately, no known documentary or other sources that can definitively prove or disprove whether English speaking and Afrikaans speaking white veterans voted for Malan in 1948. However, it certainly was the case that the Nationalists promised to honour all obligations entered into by the Smuts government towards ex-servicemen.⁷⁸ It is also clear, from the large body of new evidence explored here, that attitudes developed during the war resonated with the Nationalist vision for South Africa. In this context, it does appear reasonable to conclude that this coincidence of interest and attitudes, made possible by the men's experience as part of the UDF in the Second World War, must have at least implicitly underpinned the ex-military vote in the epoch defining election of 1948.

view. Roos argues that white veterans did not shift their allegiance to the National Party in 1948 due to the fact that they were still too closely associated with fascism and Nazism (Roos, *Ordinary Springboks*, p. 11). Oosthuizen argues that while many might not have supported UP policies most still voted UP, 'if only as a vague symbol of an ideal once considered worth fighting for' (Oosthuizen, 'Soldiers and Politics', *South African Journal of Military Studies*, p. 27).

⁷⁷ Grundlingh, 'The King's Afrikaners?', p. 364-5.

⁷⁸ Davenport and Saunders, *South Africa*, p. 371.